

New Hall School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Clive Lucas / Dorrit Andrews
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	New Hall School, Boreham, CHELMSFORD, CM3 3HS
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Date of last inspection	28/11/2006

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

New Hall School is a boarding and day school for both boys and girls aged three to 18 years. There is a co-educational preparatory school on the same site. The school operates as an independent charitable trust. It is run by a senior management team, who report to a board of governors. Christian values and ethos underpin school life. The school welcomes pupils from other faiths and different cultures.

The boarding accommodation is divided into four houses according to age and gender. The school has extensive grounds and a wide range of sports and recreational facilities. These include a swimming pool; national standard athletics track, two sports centres and facilities for a range of other sports, which can be used by boarders outside of educational time.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection took place at short notice and looked at the key national minimum standards for boarding schools. The school provides outstanding care for its boarders. Outcome groups for being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; positive contribution and organisation are judged to be outstanding. The outcome group for economic wellbeing is judged as good. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Boarders are very clear that staff promote inclusion and will not tolerate discrimination. No breaches to the national minimum standards were found during this inspection.

The leadership and staffing of the boarding provision is a real strength. Staff know what their roles and responsibilities are and show a commitment to fulfilling these and providing a high standard of care across all areas of boarding. Boarders appreciate the staff and speak very well of them. They enjoy boarding at the school and made many positive comments about it. One boarder said that they 'can't imagine not being a boarder'.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection in November 2006, recommendations were made relating to records on boarders, the management of medication and food handling training. All of these matters have been addressed. There are now objective and confidential records on the health and welfare of boarders. These help to ensure that staff provide appropriate support to meet boarders' needs without compromising their confidentiality. There are effective systems in place for the management and

administration of medicines and staff receive appropriate food handling training. This helps to ensure boarders' safety.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health is safeguarded and promoted to a high degree. They receive relevant information on a wide range of subjects relating to their personal, social and health education. This helps them to be well informed and make appropriate choices relating to their health. There are very efficient systems in place to make sure that boarders have access to first aid and health care which meets their needs well. This includes comprehensive cover from appropriately qualified and trained health centre staff. Furthermore, if boarders need to be referred to external health services, this is done effectively. Should a boarder request to see a doctor of a specific gender, this is arranged sensitively. Individual health needs are managed well and with tact, so that boarders are not embarrassed and their confidentiality is safeguarded. Accidents are recorded and comprehensively monitored to identify trends and help reduce any potential risks to boarders. The high standard of practice in meeting boarders' health needs is supported by a wide range of policies, which are readily available to staff and regularly updated. There is an efficient and confidential system for health records in the boarding houses and the health centre.

There are very good catering facilities in the school. Consequently, boarders have access to nutritious and well-prepared meals, which they enjoy and appreciate. A catering committee meets every half term and includes at least two representatives from each boarding house. Boarders' views, expressed through this committee, are taken seriously. Boarders are able to give examples of changes made to menus as a result of their views. The school provides appropriate food for boarders who have specific dietary needs such as gluten intolerance. Both catering and boarding staff receive training in food handling and hygiene, so that meals are produced safely. Fresh fruit, drinks and basic snacks are available in the boarding houses. Boarders are able to use the kitchens in the houses in the evenings and weekends. They are also able to opt out of one meal at weekends and cook for themselves, with friends or staff. This provides nice social opportunities and provides them with important skills that will help them in the future, such as at university.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There are extensive measures to protect boarders from bullying, which are effective in practice. These include pupils being trained as cyber mentors; a peer support group called Willow; clear and comprehensive policies and swift and effective responses from boarding staff. These measures are supported by the school ethos of inclusion and valuing individuals. Boarders say that there is no bullying and that they have confidence in staff, who are quick to respond to problems. There are effective and robust child protection policies and procedures. There is an openness about child

protection within the school, which helps to protect boarders. For example they are made aware of the role of the child protection co-ordinator. Regular internal and external training is provided for all staff, including ancillary staff. This ensures that all staff who come into contact with boarders have an understanding of child protection that is appropriate to their role, and so are in a position to protect boarders. Senior pupils with positions of responsibility receive guidance about their role. This includes the importance of passing on concerns to staff and not keeping secrets. New staff are provided with child protection information as part of the regular programme on induction training, so they are well informed of their roles and responsibilities.

All boarders get written information on the code of conduct annually. As a result they are clear about the expectations of them and accept responsibility for their behaviour. Some boarders commented positively on the flexibility that boarding staff allow them in response to good behaviour. There are clear policies and procedures that are consistently applied across the boarding houses. The recognition of good behaviour is seen as important in policies and also in practice. This includes positive feedback to parents. All of these contribute to the very high standard of behaviour in the school.

There are comprehensive and robust procedures and processes in place to protect boarders' safety and welfare. This includes protecting them from the risk of fire. There are regular fire drills and boarders say that they know what to do in the event of a fire. Fire alarms and fire fighting equipment are regularly serviced and checked to ensure that they are in good working order. The bursar effectively oversees and monitors a wide range of risk assessments and other processes, so that any risk to boarders is minimised. She reports to the health and safety committee, which meets once a term. There is clear written guidance for staff on respecting boarders' privacy. Staff describe practice which adheres to this guidance. Boarders are clear that staff do respect their privacy while in their bedrooms and using showers and baths. Boarding accommodation is separated from the general school facilities, which further aids boarders' privacy.

There are robust and effective procedures in place for the selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers. All of the required checks are undertaken before staff begin work and clear records are kept to substantiate this. The school employs security personnel and has closed circuit television cameras at strategic points. In addition to this, staff are vigilant in supervising boarders. Collectively, these measures safeguard boarders from any potential risk posed by external visitors and members of the public who use facilities at the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders clearly state that they can approach any member of staff if they have any worries or concerns. This helps to ensure that they can find someone whom they feel comfortable to speak to. They speak very highly of boarding staff and in particular of the vice principal for pastoral care. Overall there is very comprehensive support for

boarders. This includes boarding staff; a counsellor; tutors; an independent listener; access to helpline telephone numbers and a range of peer support. A number of boarders spoke positively of the peer support that is available through the Willow Group and cyber mentors. The Willow Group is made up of year 12 and 13 students who meet regularly with identified tutor groups and also offer a drop-in facility. They can also be contacted through e-mail and mobile telephone, so they are readily accessible to any boarder who wants to speak to them. There is also a group of trained cyber mentors to support boarders who may be subject to any form of cyber bullying.

Boarders say that there is no discrimination and that staff 'are good at picking things up'. Both British and overseas students speak positively about the cultural mix in the school. Issues relating to equality and diversity are comprehensively covered in the school's policies and staff describe good practice in this area. There is a real sense of sense of community, which is promoted by the inclusive ethos of school. Boarders are helped to develop an understanding of the needs of others, through the wide range of charitable work which they get involved in.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders say that their views are sought through a wide range of formal and informal activities. These include the school council, and eco council, the food committee, house meetings and ongoing discussions with boarding staff. In addition to this there are separate written consultations in each house that are used to improve the quality of care for boarders. Consequently, boarders are widely consulted and they are encouraged to give their views about boarding at the school. There are effective systems to allow boarders to keep in contact with their families. They all have mobile telephones, have easy access to portable telephones in each house, can write letters and use e-mail and other technological methods of communication. Boarding staff maintain contact with parents to keep them informed of their children's welfare and achievements.

Boarders say that they are given a very good induction into boarding; 'there are lots of boarding staff, they are helpful and people are friendly'. They describe highly effective processes of induction to help them settle into boarding at the school. These include the provision of comprehensive written information; an identified buddy and letters from the buddy and housemaster or housemistress before they arrive at the school. In addition there are activities planned to help them integrate once they are at the school. Boarders who do not speak English as their first language can have information translated for them if required.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Effective protection is provided for boarders' personal possessions and money. This includes lockable space in bedrooms and options for money or valuables to be looked after by the school. Boarders have a choice about whether they maintain their own savings accounts and cash card or use the facilities provided by the school to keep their money. There are four separate boarding houses, divided by age and gender. There is a rolling programme of refurbishment. Consequently there is some variation in the quality of boarding houses depending upon where they fit in the programme. However, the variations are not unreasonable and the standard of accommodation is good across the boarding as a whole. Accommodation is clean, appropriately heated and ventilated. Furnishings are of a good standard. Boarders speak positively about the boarding accommodation. The majority of bedrooms are single occupancy, and other rooms are shared by boarders of similar ages. Boarders can personalise their rooms if they wish to. There are sufficient toilet and washing facilities, which provide appropriate levels of privacy. Boarders say that they can shower and bathe when they wish and that there is always sufficient hot water.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is a suitable Statement of Boarding principles and practice, which is freely available to boarders. It accurately reflects the practice within the school. The school website provides a very good level of information and is kept up to date. Boarding accommodation is appropriately separated in terms of gender and age. There are no unacceptable differences in the standards of accommodation across the school. Heads of boarding houses meet together regularly. This helps them to ensure that practices are consistent and provides opportunities for them to learn from each other, so that high boarding standards are maintained.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This is thoroughly supported by the inclusive ethos of the school, which celebrates people's differences. Boarders are very clear that staff do not tolerate any discrimination. They say that they really enjoy boarding at the school and gain positive experiences from the diversity among the boarding population.

The boarders benefit from attending a school in which boarding is well run and led, with delegation of roles across a senior management team. Senior staff take responsibilities for their areas of work including the effective monitoring of records. This helps them to improve the level of care for boarders, identify and address any areas of risk and respond to any trends. There are ample staff to supervise boarders. There is always an identified member of staff in charge during boarding times. Boarders know who is on duty and how to contact them during the evenings as well as during the night. They say that staff respond sympathetically if they need to contact them during the night. Staffing includes both genders and a range of ages,

including GAP staff, so that boarders can find someone they feel comfortable with. On-call support for staff is available from members of the senior management team and the health centre. Boarders say that there are plenty of boarding staff available.

All boarding staff have job descriptions that clearly set out their role in boarding and lines of accountability. They receive thorough induction training and regular reviews of their practice. They also have access to opportunities for continuing training which is relevant to their boarding role. This includes training which is provided internally as well as that from specialist external providers. There is clear and full written guidance, policies and procedures for boarding staff, including additional guidance specifically for GAP students. Consequently, boarders are looked after by staff who are well trained and informed about their roles.